

LOVE IN A STAGE-COACH.

by A BACHELOR.

How it poured! Rattle—rattle—rattle against the casement: splash—splash—splash on the ground underneath all night, and now, when I awoke, here it was raining away harder than ever, as if a second deluge was at hand. Confound that breakfast bell! I do wish there was no such thing as a breakfast on a rainy morning, for then one might lie abed all day, or until the storm cleared off. Philosophers tell us that rain is necessary for the economy of nature—it may be true, though I never trouble myself about such things—but if so, men ought to be made like dormice to sleep on in a semi-animated state, until the rain sees fit to cease. Nature never intended us to be out in a shower, or we would have been born with patent oil-cloth or india rubber skins.

Down it poured! What on earth was I to do? The day before had been the brightest one of the bright month of May, and, as I had a passion for walking in the country—more fool for it!—I had trudged away off here, eight miles and more from town, to see a country wedding, “after the good order used among Friends.” I must say that the thing was very handsomely done, and that I was much edified thereat—so much so, that, one of these days, I shall perhaps tell how the parties deported themselves, how many new hats there were in the wedding companies, who drove the finest horses, and all the other matters of gossip so interesting to young misses, and old bachelors like myself. The day passed off, with a bright blue sky, until toward dusk, when a thunder-shower came up, that lasted until bed time; but I retired, fully resolved that the morning would see a clear sky overhead. But morning had come; and here it was, pouring, pouring down, in one dark, splashy, continuous stream, for all the world like an old maid’s objurgations when her tongue gets wagging!

Down I hurried to the breakfast table. I had just buttered my bread and was swallowing the first mouthful of coffee, when the horn of the coach to town was heard, and looking out the window I saw the vehicle, with its four smoking horses, dashing down the turnpike. It was my only chance to reach the city that day. I bolted my bread, gulped down the coffee till my throat was scalded, jammed my hat on my head, and made a dive through the door. The driver did not see me, but cracked his whip with a flourish and went on. I shouted. Still the old villain would not notice me, but with another flourish of his whip, set his four in hand into a brisker trot, and rattled down the hill. Desperate with the fear of

being left I pitched after him, spattering the mud around at every step, and shouting at the top of my lungs; but I might have ran on and shouted till doomsday, had not a passenger seen me and stopped the deaf old sinner. Out of breath, wet to the skin, covered with mud from head to foot, and not in the best humor from the loss of my breakfast, I mounted into the coach; but the instant I placed my foot inside the vehicle all my sulkiness vanished, for there sat—the only passenger beside myself—one of the loveliest angels that ever blessed an old ricketty coach, or warmed the soul of a sour, breakfastless bachelor with her presence.

Did you ever fall in love? Of course. And the lady was the loveliest of her sex? To be sure. Then this stage-coach beauty was twice as handsome as your sweetheart; and if, after this, you don't think my fellow passenger a cherub, then I give up all hope of making you appreciate her. Such eyes, such teeth, and then such lips!—egad, it almost makes me crazy to think of them. I put myself down for the luckiest dog in the world. She was dressed in a plain straw cottage bonnet with a green veil—"just such a costume," said I, "as a *real* lady wears when travelling"—and then she gave me such a sweet but half roguish smile as I tumbled into the coach in the plight I have described, that I knew her at once to be a paragon in the way of education, taste, fortune, and all that; and I resolved—what knowing one wouldn't?—to make the agreeable off hand, for there's nothing like meeting an heiress in a stagecoach, where she thinks she's unknown, and dreams that every attention paid to her springs from pure love — ahem!—on your part.

I was in clover. What cared I for the rain. Splash —splash—splash, aye! rain away there like blazes— who cares? One doesn't get tête-à-tête with a pretty girl every day of the week—so I determined to make the most of it.

"The storm without might rair and rustle
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle."

And, faith, what with a few sly compliments, and my extraordinary good looks, I soon got as cozy with my unknown beauty, and she with me, as if we had been acquainted since the days of Noah. We talked of the wedding, for she too had been there— of the scenery— of the rain—and of whatever came uppermost; and there was such a charming frankness in all she said that I really thought her the most winning little witch I had ever seen, and I verily believe if the floor had been softer or I had known the accurate number of houses to which I would be tenant in courtesy, I. should have gone down on my knees to her at once.. I hate shewing one's learning off in public, so I avoided any thing like literature,

though I saw by the intelligent eyes of my charmer that she had a soul alive to all the finer sensibilities of nature. At length we got on the subject of house-keeping. Now, if there's anything I hate it's a woman that can't keep house, and I trembled at every word lest my angel should confess her ignorance of these matters. Shade of Apicus! how my heart leaped when she told me that hardly a day passed in which she didn't make bread, or pies, or sponge-cake, or some other of those shim-shaws that delight the heart of man; and when, in expatiating on such delicacies, she rose to a pitch of eloquence that I never heard surpassed, I couldn't resist my feelings, but snatched her hand to my lips and kissed it. Yes! I felt that she was destined to be mine; for if there's anything a wife ought to know it's this. I come of a race of eaters. My grandfather, has lunched on half a dozen rabbits, and died at last of a surfeit produced by eating two young pigs. My father can break his fast on a brace of capons, or devour a pair of turkeys without having to pick his teeth; and the way a brother of mine can tuck in the hundreds of pickled oysters and dishes of chicken salad, does credit to the family. My own exploits in this line modesty forbids me to mention. No wonder I loved this rosy little beauty who could get up such a choice fry, and bake such delicious cakes. Ah! what a life of domestic happiness rose before my vision, when I pictured myself returning home from court at night, to meet a beefsteak ready boiled, or a bowl of the richest turtle soup, served up by the fair hand of the angel at my side. I resolved, if there was virtue in a pair of whiskers, in an eloquent tongue, or in my new blue coat, to win this seraph of pie-bakers.

There's no place like a stage-coach for making love. It comes natural! You do it, egad, in a sort of easy, don't-care-for-any-thing style, that you can't, for the life of you, assume in any other place. What betwixt sitting on the same seat to talk more conveniently, and putting your arm around her waist to keep her from jolting off you soon get to be wonderfully cozy, and—ten to one—if you don't catch yourself squeezing her hand, or varying the entertainments in some other way, before you're aware of it. For my part, as I have said, I was ready to surrender at discretion, and I already fancied myself lightening the dear creature beside me of the troublesome duty of collecting the rents of her various fine houses. I was charmed to think of the progress I had made in her affections. What a delicately rosy cheek it was that I just then slyly kissed, she blushing the deeper at my warmth! And then her saucy, pouting lips; and her figure, just the very size for a man who hated your thin, weasel-shaped young misses as he hated epidemics. Ah! what a wife she would make! How I thanked my stars that I had hitherto set my face like a flint against every temptation to marry—for now my firmness was to be rewarded by this beauty and heiress dropping into my mouth. And then I preached to myself a mental homily on the shortsightedness of man, as I ventured to steal another kiss from the conscious

and blushing little angel at my side.

I was just about to pop the question itself, when the coach stopped, and the driver descended and opened the door. My charmer rose. I was taken all aback.

“Do you get out here!” said I in surprise.

“Yes!” said she, “I see Mr. Powell is waiting for me.

“Mr. Powell,” said I, for that was the name of a friend of mine who lived up this very lane, not half a mile from the turnpike, “do you then live with him? Perhaps you’re a relative? Strange,” I muttered to myself, “I never heard him speak of this charming creature.”

Before I could answer, Powell approached, and while he hailed me, my fellow passenger sprang to the ground as if by magic, and the next minute was in my friend’s vehicle.

“For heaven’s sake,” said I, half mad that the hearty grip of Powell prevented me from hastening to his ward’s assistance, “who is that angel? Is she a relative, a ward, or what? I’m dying for love of her!”

Powell burst into a laugh, and laughed on until the tears came into his eyes. Confound the fellow what did he mean? I began to look angry.

“Come, my dear boy,” he said, “don’t get into a passion, but consider how odd it is that you of all men should fall in love with *my cook!*”

I never make acquaintances in a stage-coach now, until I have exchanged cards.

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